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LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE.

FRANCE.

THE recent work of M. J. Novicow, *Les luttes entre sociétés humaines et leurs phases successives*, forms an interesting contribution to social science. The author, by birth a Russian, has already published a book in our language, *La politique internationale*, which has been the subject of much comment. Works of this kind, once said a distinguished German to me, labor under the misfortune that they are not read by statesmen, and that the scholars and students who read them are unable to apply their teachings. This objection does not absolutely hold, for the general thought of mankind, which in the end always impresses itself on governments, is continuously modified by the secret infiltrations of books, and, as M. Novicow himself writes, "it is only by acting on public opinion that we can hope ever to control the world."

This large work—it contains not less than seven hundred and fifty pages—would have gained much by being abridged and more thoroughly systematised. Filled with indifferent facts, a severe revision would greatly increase its worth. But I do not wish to cavil: more important criticisms claim our attention.

In reviewing the general arguments by which M. Novicow connects his conception of human society with the leading ideas of biology and astronomy, we discover at once that, with all the sociologists of our time, he has absorbed the powerful influence of Comte. But he has also acquired from the English school the faculty of painstaking care and the laborious consideration of details. "It is owing to the neglect," he writes, "which has prevailed till the pres-

ent time, of a careful examination of almost imperceptible facts that sociology is still so far behind the other sciences." For the foundations of his work, he directly borrows from Darwinism the principles, now so widely diffused, which the simple phrases "struggle for life," "survival of the fittest," "adaptation," etc., will suffice to evoke in all minds. He is not, indeed, the first to apply the ideas of evolution and competition to social phenomena. But his work is precisely executed; and if the conclusions which he presents do not all clearly and indubitably proceed from his biological premises, it must yet be acknowledged that he reaches results to which these premises give greater solidity and which have, thus, infinitely more chance of being exact. Sociology, in the present state of affairs, cannot give us more.

The fundamental thesis of M. Novicow is accordingly this: that the struggle between the component groups of human society is a prolongation of the great struggle for life which rules the whole animate world; that it is continued here in many different forms peculiar to social phenomena, and that all our efforts should be to bring it about that this struggle produces progress and justice, that is to say, "an acceleration of adaptation." And to establish the equivalence of these factors, the biological and the moral, so often supposed contradictory, is the task on which M. Novicow concentrates all his powers.

According to him, the biological law is constantly transforming itself into moral law; a contention which he proves by a contrast of the struggle for life as it was in the past with what it has become in the present and probably will become in the future. In proportion as the social aggregations of humanity have become more and more perfected, the competition of life has taken higher forms: the purely physiological, or animal, struggle has been followed by economical and political struggles, and finally, by intellectual struggles, and in each of these successions of facts we have beheld processes more rational and rapid take the place of the old faulty and tedious ones. I must refer the reader to the book itself for the full development of all these points, and restrict myself here to pointing out in a few lines the general solutions of the author: in the economical

order are opposed, the vices of protectionism, which is at bottom nothing else than "the spoliation of the capable at the expense of the incapable," and the salutary practice of free trade ; in the political order the free association of social groups takes the place of the illusion of great states, the state of peace succeeding the state of war, which can be nothing more than a simple pathological accident ; in the intellectual order, religious persecution, constraint under all its forms gives way to spiritual activity, to the free communication of minds through space ; in fine, the suppression of the idle and factotum state, and of the frightful fiscal tendencies which are its expression ; the liberty for every individual of living where he thinks best, and also for each group of associating itself with the nationality which it may select ; the voluntary federation of states instead of the so-called equilibrium of powers ; "an intense upward movement, the ardent struggle and victory of the better, realised with the greatest possible rapidity."

Some will reproach M. Novicow with having set up here a theory of individualism—even to the extent of establishing an individualism of collective groups—at the very moment when this doctrine has produced its last excesses. To which our author might reply that these excesses are such only in appearance, and that it is now time to stop in the movement of reaction which is carrying us headlong into the abyss of state-socialism, the most ruinous of tyrannies. Others will accuse him of attempting to build in the air an imaginary republic. But he knows the difficulties with which he has to deal, he does not reckon without the factor of time, and it is the briefness alone in which I have here expressed his doctrines that makes them appear so extreme.

No, M. Novicow does not dream of an idyllic society. He is bold without being adventurous, and free from prejudices without being revolutionary. It is primarily in the interests of real gain, understood in its best sense, that he protests against the erroneous doctrines of the old society, and it indeed seems at times as if he were "beating down open doors." But it often happens that open doors close behind us, and, besides, we have within us, almost without exception, a double nature, that of our scientific instruction and

that of our prejudices. Our conduct is a perpetual compromise between the men which we were yesterday and that which we shall be to-morrow. In the eyes of the child there is no reason that the design of society should change any more than should the profile of the mountains on the horizon. The majority of men preserve this infantine illusion and cry ever for an Utopia. Meanwhile, the world changes without cessation, and in the end *all* is accomplished—even that which is reasonable.

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M. F. R. PAULHAN'S new book, *Joseph de Maistre et sa philosophie*, carries us a good ways from M. Novicow, far behind him, and also far in advance of him. To Joseph de Maistre, and in the point of view from which he is usually regarded, the future is only the mirage of the Catholic past, or that past the rough outline of the future. It is this idea which M. Paulhan has so well placed in relief. The personality of Joseph de Maistre, so interesting to French thought, should not be less so to American thought. Certainly every reader will derive benefit from the book of which I am now speaking, a brief, excellent and precise study, the best which we yet possess on this rare writer and original thinker.

Here we may see what secret bonds unite the most dissimilar minds ; how much, different philosophies modify the same facts ; and how greatly, also, the force of facts can reduce the divergencies of different philosophies ! I extract from a page of De Maistre these passages : "In the vast domain of animate nature open violence reigns, a species of foreordained anger that arms all creatures *in mutua funera* : the moment you pass from the kingdom of insensible matter you find the decree of violent death written on the very boundaries of life . . . a philosopher can even discover how this eternal carnage is foreseen and ordered in the great All. . . The entire earth, constantly saturated with blood, is but an immense altar, on which all that lives is immolated, endlessly, immeasurably, without relaxation, till the consummation of things, till the extinction of evil, till the death of death." Here is the law of the struggle for existence, formulated with sombre energy a half a century before Darwin. But it does not assume in the doctrine of Maistre its

“natural” purport. For him, pain and war are the *expiation* of the evil of the world. Men are one with each other; each is satisfied through the other. War, moreover, involves an advancement towards what has always been our dream, *unity*. It is of no consequence here that Joseph de Maistre wished to realise temporal unity by means of a “king,” and spiritual unity by the Pope. His conception of unity and his view of the enigma of pain make him turn his eyes to the future. For this Catholic and Christian thinker, religion does not possess its supreme value so much in virtue of its dogmas as in virtue of the unity of beliefs and habits that it realises, i. e. by the quantity of common feeling which it creates. War, if an expiation, is the indicator of our progress towards that unity, that “accord,” the ultimate sign of which will be the disappearance of evil. “Evil,” writes Maistre, “is the schism of life, it is untruth.”

If we put these things in other words, and picture to ourselves other political processes and other details of operation, we shall not be so far from Maistre as we think. M. Paulhan is right. “If we will but transpose, so to speak, the thought of Joseph de Maistre, and interpret it in a slightly different manner from what it has been, we shall not only enjoy the beauty, but shall also apprehend the truth of his ideas, and, to a great extent also, of his general theories.”

M. PAUL SOURIAU has recently published a book entitled *La suggestion dans l'art*. There is, in this interesting work, no lack of facts or of subtle expositions. But I have some objections to its thesis—that art is a matter of suggestion. If we simply *compare* the effect produced on us by a work of art to the effects of hypnotism, the comparison is admissible and offers striking hints. But if we *identify* æsthetic pleasure with hypnosis, we commit, in my judgment, a singular abuse of language. And if, finally, we advise the student, in order to augment the effect of art, to have recourse to hypnotic methods, the artist will soon have a public formed only of “suggestible” individuals *par excellence*, that is, of hysterical and degenerate subjects. M. Souriau, unfortunately, does not fully adhere to his comparison. He seeks to explain the enjoyment of art

as a species of hypnosis, and he would go perhaps to the extent of accepting a theory of hallucinatory dreams produced by the combined seductions of smell, sight, hearing, and touch. A chaste hallucination, of course, in which the artist would not address the senses, but would acquire a mastery of souls and cause the beautiful dreams of his own mind to pass into those of others!

I oppose theses of this sort always, in whatsoever form they appear.

When we make the charm of art consist of hypnosis, we neglect too much the importance of the specific sensation without which there is no true art. And this is exactly what M. Souriau does, despite his delicate artistic sense. He sets too little value on the pleasure attached to the simple sensorial perception, and he does not perceive that by following that inclination he arrives at an æsthetics of Ruskin, and enrolls himself among the Pre-Raphaelites, or in the neuropathic school of art. If the sensation of hearing or of sight plays in music or in painting so slight a part, it will no longer be worth one's while to become a Rembrandt or a Beethoven. A colored scarf that blinds the eyes, a tom-tom that deafens the ears, will fulfil equally well our purpose. If hypnosis is the perfect state of emotion, there is no need of great effort to put us to sleep, nor even to procure for us agreeable dreams. As to the means of putting the hallucinations into our poor little brains, if the artist could ever become the magician that M. Souriau pictures him, he would not be slow, alas, to abuse his power and would soon be banished from all free states.

But things really come to pass in a more simple manner, both in the artist who creates, and in the hearer, the spectator, who admires. M. Souriau knows this well, and he is too good a psychologist to be given a lesson on this point. But he has yielded to the temptation of pushing a seductive analogy to extremes; he has forgotten that "comparison is not reason," that analogy is fraught with dangers, and that one should be careful in the reduction of all phenomena of a class to a single principle, lest we lose track of the whole.

It would be easy for me to add to these criticisms, in con-

nexion with a work of Wundt's which has just been published in French, under the title of *Hypnotisme et suggestion*. Wundt vigorously combats here Schmidkunz's theory, which I also contested in the *Revue philosophique*, that all psychical facts, from simple perception to the noblest artistic and social creations, are nothing but "suggestions." But I shall not insist here on these points, as I have also a few words to say of another attempt, quite different, but equally adventurous, in the field of æsthetics.

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M. MAURICE GRIVEAU, in his *Éléments du beau, analyse et synthèse des faits esthétiques d'après les documents du langage*, has set himself the task of making an inventory of language, with the view of discovering in such an inventory the elements of the beautiful, or, more exactly, the reason and the value of æsthetic judgment in all fields. One of our best-known poets, M. Sully Prudhomme, attempted a similar task; but he did not aim at the same end as Griveau, whose object is none other than to establish a numerical æsthetics, that is to say, to refer our judgments of taste to operations of "unconscious mathematics."

What kind of relation, the reader will ask, can possibly exist between such a mathematics and the adjectives of the languages we speak? Picture to yourself a vast lexicological table where all qualitative words are arranged in two crossed directions, first, in a vertical direction, according to their qualitative value (in the hierarchical order of the sensations, from the most elementary to the most complex), second, in a horizontal direction, according to their quantitative value, (forming a scale indicating the increase of intensity of sensations). This table arranged, he deduces from it—I cannot enter into details—two principal facts. The vertical arrangement of epithets shows us that language always passes from the symbolism of "reflexes" to the expression of "states of consciousness"; for example, from a subjective point of view, *alléchant, rafraîchissant, agréable*; from an objective point of view, *sucré, doux, bon*. The horizontal order reveals a curious fact, that the extreme terms of every lexicological gamut are pejoratives, (thus, *glacial* and *brûlant, fade* and *déce, imperceptible* and *assourdissant*), the interme-

diary terms generally remaining favorable for starting from a middle point, or rather from a mean zone of indifference.

Now, these various zones of a gamut have their exact physiological expression. The table of qualificative words can be translated by a "gradual contrast," passing, through different states, from increasing inhibition to the left to increasing dynamogeny to the right. The mediocre answers to the just mean; at the intermediary points the feeling becomes æsthetic; at the extremes the organic sensation alone dominates, and we reach the limits where impression becomes painful. "Imagination completes its rôle of appreciation when sensibility begins its rôle."

But are not our internal states, thus placed in relief by language, correlated with the exterior rhythm of things? Does there not exist an objective ideal, the positive sum of harmonies and dissonances, to which our different states of physiological ease and disease attach themselves? In fine, can there not be disengaged from some such scheme of human speech a graphic system whose chief lines blend with that of the *oscillation of some correspondent reality*? These are the questions that have led M. Griveau to the theory of numerical æsthetics, and in this domain he has found a coadjutor in M. Charles Henry, whose patient and difficult researches I shall some day discuss.

In the want of other positive results, the inquiry of M. Griveau will furnish at least a confirmation, quite unexpected, of the theory of Spencer and Grant Allen, according to which "an æsthetic feeling is at bottom only a weakened physiological sensation."*

LUCIEN ARRÉAT.

* All these works are published by Alcan.